SPEECH FROM THE THRONE
HIGHLIGHTS – MARCH 18, 2003

A PLAN. A VISION. A FUTURE WIDE OPEN.

EXPANSION OF OUR ECONOMY

- Saskatchewan's economy continues to grow and diversify, even through two years of drought.
- Increased employment for ten consecutive months.
- Agriculture Policy Framework provides federal-provincial cost sharing.
- Action Committee on the Rural Economy will help implement the Rural Development Strategy.
- 10-year beef production strategy planned.
- Policies in place to support mining, oil and gas and forestry expansion. Oil and gas drilling up 68% in 2003.
- Multi-year *Building for the Future* capital commitment will improve facilities and facilitate economic growth.
- Digital cellular service to reach 94% of our population this year; high speed Internet available to 74%.
- Crown sector has provided $1.6 billion over the past eight years to the people of Saskatchewan.
- Premier to lead *Team Saskatchewan* - with business and community leaders – as part of *Future Wide Open* campaign to attract investment and promote Saskatchewan.
- Our competitive business development climate includes:
  - Quality telecommunications, energy and transportation infrastructure
  - No payroll taxes or health care premiums
  - Reduced business and personal income taxes
  - Lower operating costs than other regions
  - Well-trained workforce with low staff turnover

PROTECTING MEDICARE

- National health care priorities supported by implementation of *Action Plan for Saskatchewan Health Care*.
- 40 positions added to northern health sciences and nurse training program, increasing first-year nurse training positions to 300.
- 3,000 health professional training positions in place plus 1,700 for home care and special care training.
- More than 400 bursaries provided for health training.
- 12 Regional Health Authorities in place.
- 24-hour health advice phone line in operation this year.

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OPENING DOORS TO THE FUTURE: EDUCATION AND TRAINING

- Province's investment per Kindergarten to Grade 12 student increased 42% during past five years.
- Support for child care subsidies and spaces, *Kids First* and Pre-Kindergarten programs to be increased.
- Provincial funding of scholarships, bursaries and grants for more than 11,000 post-secondary students; training allowances for more than 5,500.
- Student Loan Program to be enhanced.
- Employment support programs to be extended to 680 persons with disabilities.
- *Campus Saskatchewan* offers access to more than 150 on line credit courses.
- Direct investment in research and development to exceed $50 million.

A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE - ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION

- New *Green Power* portfolio announced:
  - Nine-fold increase in wind power generation over the next three years
  - Support for small-scale renewable energy
  - Expansion of SaskPower's *Energy Solutions* retrofit program
- Increased funding for SARCAN.
- Forest fire prevention program to be expanded.
- Water quality reports to be available on line.
- Park improvements and new cottage subdivisions planned.
- Saskatchewan seeking federal action on agriculture carbon-sinks and northern abandoned mines.

SECURE FAMILIES AND VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

- Centenary Affordable Housing Program to provide almost 1,400 homes during the next four years.
- 9-1-1 emergency service extended to 95% of population.
- Targeted crime strategy expanding beyond auto-theft strategy in Regina to other communities.
- Coverage for fire fighters to be expanded under WCB.
- Community Initiatives Fund grants program expanded.
- *Building Independence* reducing social assistance caseload.
- Funding support for municipalities continues:
  - Revenue-sharing grants (to limit property tax increases), infrastructure cost-sharing, and capital grants for transit to persons with disabilities.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE 2003

Delivered on the Occasion of the Opening of

The Fourth Session of The Twenty-Fourth Legislature Province of Saskatchewan

Tuesday, March 18, 2003

The Honourable Lynda Haverstock
Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan

A VISION. A PLAN.
A FUTURE WIDE OPEN.

MR. SPEAKER, MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY, CITIZENS OF SASKATCHEWAN

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the fourth session of the twenty-fourth Legislature of the Province of Saskatchewan.

It is with sadness that I note the passing of two Members of this Legislative Assembly since the last session was convened on March 14 last year. I recognize the contribution of the former Member for Battleford-Cutknife, Rudi Peters and the former Member for Carrot River Valley, Carl Kwiatkowski. I also acknowledge the loss of one of our province's most distinguished citizens, former Governor-General Ramon Hnatyshyn who passed away in December.

As we begin this new legislative session, changes will be proposed to the roles and responsibilities of the standing committees of the Legislature. These changes were unanimously recommended by the Assembly's Special Committee on Rules and Procedures. They will strengthen the role of the Members and provide increased public input into the legislative process. They will help make the operations of the Legislature more open, accountable and responsive to our citizens.

In two years, Saskatchewan will celebrate its 100th anniversary.

However, many of our communities are older than the province itself. More than 20 communities were incorporated as municipalities in 1903, when Saskatchewan was still part of the North-West Territories. Many of those towns and cities are celebrating their own centennials this year.

We can look forward to participating in community centennial celebrations during the months ahead.

We can also look forward to a visit to Saskatchewan by the Earl and the Countess of Wessex. The royal couple will participate in events marking the centennials of Regina, Moose Jaw and Lloydminster. As well, they will visit Prince Albert to unveil the wall of recognition in that city's impressive new Visual and Performing Arts Centre. When in Regina, they will participate in the opening of the magnificent Saskatchewan Indian Federated College building at the University of Regina.

DEDICATION

We have much to celebrate in our past. But, even more, we have much to celebrate as we look to our future.

I am pleased to acknowledge several groups present in the gallery today who are representative of the future strength of our province.

The Dakota Cree Drummers and Singers are a drum group from the Piapot First Nation.

The Swift Current Comp Chamber Singers, directed by Marcia McLean, is an award-winning choir from the Swift Current Comprehensive High School.

Also in the gallery are a number of Team Saskatchewan members who represented our province so well at the recent Canada Winter Games in New Brunswick. More than 300 Team Saskatchewan athletes, coaches and officials attended the Games. Our team won 38 medals – double the number won at the last Winter Games four years ago.

I would like to acknowledge two other groups of Saskatchewan athletes. The 2003 national Junior Women's Team, skipped by Marliese Miller, and the national Junior Men's Team, led by Steve Layton, are both from Saskatoon. Today they are traveling to Switzerland to represent Canada in the World Junior Curling Championships. We wish them well.

These groups of young people are the personification of Saskatchewan's future.

It is to that future that I dedicate the plans of the government.

The essence of our government's agenda is contained in eight words:

A vision. A plan. A future wide open.

VISION

Our government's vision is a province of opportunity, where the future is wide open to those prepared to dream big, plan well and work hard.

It is a vision of an expanding economy from which no one is excluded.

It is a vision of a province where all children will have the opportunity to grow up healthy, in safe, secure communities, receive the very best in education and training, and be encouraged, in turn, to build successful families and careers here at home.

It is a vision of a *green* Saskatchewan, where exciting new breakthroughs in renewable energy, environmental technology and energy conservation support a growing economy in harmony with our natural environment.

This vision is being realized through comprehensive planning in key spheres of activity.

EXPANSION OF OUR ECONOMY

Our vision of the future depends upon expanding our economy today.

Saskatchewan's economy is strong. It is expanding and diversifying.

Our government's economic plan is achieving results.

Employment in Saskatchewan has grown for ten consecutive months. Employment records have been set in six of those months.

Retail sales and business incorporations both increased by more than seven per cent last year. Growth occurred in potash sales, in the value of manufactured goods, in the value of residential building permits, and in average weekly earnings.

Capital investment in our province continues to grow.

However, we are all aware that much of Saskatchewan has faced severe drought during the past two years.

Crop insurance programs have been critical to the survival of many producers. Insurance payments resulting from reduced agricultural yields will exceed $1 billion dollars for 2002. This record payment has eliminated reserves accumulated in past years and necessitated additional debt in support of our farm communities.

Nevertheless, we have every reason to be confident about the future of our rural economy. That confidence is reflected in the Rural Development Strategy, adopted last year in response to the Action Committee on the Rural Economy – ACRE. The Committee's mandate has been expanded to monitor implementation of the Rural Strategy and to recommend new initiatives during the next two years.

The Strategy defines rural diversification as a key element of Saskatchewan's overall economic growth. Results can already be seen across the province.

One hundred and twenty-six plants now process Saskatchewan crops here at home. They add value to our commodity exports and provide employment for more than 1,200 people.

Another 1,200 people earned $34 million last year as part of our hog production industry. That industry has doubled in the last five years.

Since 1997, $433 million has been invested in construction as part of our expanding livestock industry.

We have become one of the world's largest producers and exporters of lentils, dry peas and canola.

Organic agriculture production and processing is increasing by 20 per cent annually. Saskatchewan now has about 1,000 certified commercial organic producers.

Saskatchewan is home to 25 per cent of Canada's beef cow herd. This year our government will release a 10-year beef production strategy.

Saskatchewan is poised to become Canada's leading producer of ethanol. Ethanol will help diversify our rural economy, contribute to the health of our environment and provide by-products that will support an expanded cattle feedlot sector.

Our government has worked long and hard to convince Ottawa that a more realistic national agricultural policy must be developed - to counter international subsidies and to ensure that adequate risk management programs are in place.

Although the national Agriculture Policy Framework falls short of meeting our long-term trade injury expectations, Saskatchewan's participation in the Framework will give our producers access to a larger share of national safety net funding.

The Framework will also help brand Canada as a world leader in marketing quality food products. Our province will actively participate in setting and meeting national standards for environmental sustainability and food safety. We will also be part of national initiatives to encourage innovation – innovation that will contribute to the future success of our agriculture industry.

Saskatchewan's participation in the national Agriculture Policy Framework will necessitate changes to *The Crop Insurance Act* and *The Agricultural Safety Net Act.*

The government's legislative agenda also includes amendments to *The Farm Stability Act* and *The Agricultural Implements Act*.

Beyond the rich resource of our farmland, economic expansion in our province will be based on our abundant natural and human resources.

Saskatchewan's largest economic sector, measured by the value of production, is now energy.

The government has sparked increased oil and gas exploration and development by reducing royalties and taxes on new production. Initial reports for 2003 indicate an immediate response by industry. To the end of February, drilling had increased by 68 per cent over the same period last year.

These changes are predicted to generate more than $4 billion in additional investment over the next 10 years – potentially providing 40,000 person years of new employment.

By balancing reduced royalties with increased production, it is estimated the oil and gas industry will contribute an additional $650 million to the provincial treasury during the next 10 years.

Mining and mineral exploration already support the jobs of 17,000 Saskatchewan people.

Saskatchewan has an abundant supply of coal. Our province is the world's largest producer of potash and uranium. Saskatchewan also has significant potential in gold, base metals and diamonds.

Last year, as part of our government's plan, a package of initiatives was introduced to stimulate new mineral exploration and production, particularly in the North. The package includes exploration grants, royalty and tax changes, and the provision of more geophysical data – all of which will support increased activity by prospectors and exploration companies.

Under our government's comprehensive forestry plan, Saskatchewan's forestry sector has attracted almost $1 billion in investment since 1998.

During this session, the government will present plans to improve inventories of our wood supply. These inventories will increase investment in the short term and ensure sustainable management of our forests for the long term. This four-year project will be undertaken in partnership with northern communities and the new Forestry Development Centre being established in Prince Albert.

Small and medium-sized businesses are major contributors to the expansion of Saskatchewan's economy. They provide goods and services, foster growth in tourism, manufacture value-added products from primary production, apply new technologies, and ensure expression of our cultures. They are contractors and sub-contractors. They employ thousands of Saskatchewan people.

Each year Saskatchewan companies provide more than $1 billion in goods and services to provincial government agencies and Crown corporations. Our government will implement an *Action Plan on Procurement* to assist those companies to provide an even larger percentage of goods and services to the public sector.

The government has recently amended regulations governing Labour-Sponsored Venture Capital Corporations, adding flexibility to their investment parameters. Private investment corporations represent an increasingly important source of capital for small and medium-sized Saskatchewan-based businesses.

Our government's economic plan is increasing the involvement of Métis and First Nations peoples in our growing economy.

In northern Saskatchewan, this objective is being supported through the Northern Development Fund, the involvement of Aboriginal communities in forestry development, and the recently signed federal-provincial Northern Development Accord.

Gaming profits contribute to the economic development objectives of the Métis Development Fund and the First Nations Fund. Legislative proposals during this session will include conversion of the First Nations Fund to the First Nations Trust, increasing First Nations' authority while clarifying accountability obligations.

To date, forty Saskatchewan agencies and companies have become partners in the Aboriginal Employment Development Program. This program has assisted more than 1,500 Métis and First Nations people to obtain employment.

Saskatchewan continues to work with First Nations and Canada in meeting Treaty Land Entitlement obligations. The government has facilitated the transfer of more than 470,000 acres of land to Saskatchewan First Nations since 1992. This land base is the core of long-term economic development opportunities for Saskatchewan First Nations.

Tourism is one of Saskatchewan's fastest growing industries. Building upon our province's natural beauty, history, cultures, and traditional hospitality, our government's plan is on target to increase tourism revenue by 25 per cent to $1.5 billion by 2005.

Our government believes that one of the public sector's key roles in facilitating expansion of our provincial economy is investment in infrastructure.

Saskatchewan's massive highway improvement program will continue as part of a three-year, $900 million commitment. In consultation with Area Transportation Planning Councils, plans have been developed for paving and reconstructing 750 kilometres of provincial roads this year. This includes acceleration of the twinning of Highways 1 and 16.

Infrastructure improvements will occur on many fronts. Our government will announce a multi-year *Building for the Future* capital committment as part of its 2003-04 provincial budget.

The government's plan to build for the future includes new investments in sewer and water systems and other municipal facilities. This will be done through the Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Fund, the Northern Water and Sewer Program, and the Centenary Fund. During the past two years, these programs have resulted in more than $38 million being expended specifically for new and enhanced sewer and water facilities in 145 communities.

Saskatchewan is a world leader in providing telecommunications infrastructure to rural, urban and northern regions.

In 2003, our government, through SaskTel, will complete the conversion of its entire cellular phone network to digital service and reach 94 per cent of Saskatchewan's population.

In 2003, high speed Internet will reach 366 Saskatchewan communities, covering 74 per cent of our population. A second phase of high speed Internet expansion will extend service to at least 95 per cent of our residents over the next five years.

In 2003, Saskatchewan's Crown corporations will invest a total of $650 million to extend and renew utility infrastructure in our province. This investment enables industries to expand and improves the quality of community services. It also contributes to jobs and business opportunities for Saskatchewan people and Saskatchewan companies.

Since 1905, Saskatchewan governments have recognized the value of public enterprise, contributing to a mixed economy together with the private and co-operative sectors.

During the past eight years, Saskatchewan's Crown sector has returned $1.6 billion in dividends and equity repayments to the people of Saskatchewan - the shareholders of our Crown enterprises.

Our government remains committed to a strong, responsive and evolving Crown sector.

Equally, our province has become increasingly competitive in attracting private sector investment for business development:

- We offer high quality telecommunications, energy and transportation infrastructure.
- We have no payroll taxes and no health care premiums.
- Business taxes have been reduced.
- Operating and living costs are lower in Saskatchewan than elsewhere in western Canada.
- We have a well-trained workforce with low staff turnover.

Our government's plan to expand and diversify our economy includes increasing investor awareness of the opportunities for business and industry development in Saskatchewan.

The province's *Wide Open Future* investment attraction campaign has caught the imagination and attention of people across Canada.

Two additional initiatives associated with the campaign will be undertaken later this year.

Increased support will be provided to attract immigration to our province – contributing to our economic growth. And this fall, the Premier will lead teams of business, community and government leaders to visit key Canadian centres to promote the advantages of our province.

Team Saskatchewan will increase awareness of our expanding economy, our tourism destinations, our Centennial and our investment opportunities. *Team Saskatchewan* will demonstrate that our future is *truly* wide open.

The ultimate goal of our government is to build an economic foundation in Saskatchewan to achieve the status of a 'have' province within the Canadian confederation.

OPENING DOORS TO THE FUTURE: EDUCATION AND TRAINING

To achieve our vision, our government's plan includes a major investment in education and training.

The formative years of childhood are crucial to achieving our potential as adults.

Child care is an important part of life for many families. Provincial programs support almost 8000 children in 450 licensed child care facilities. Child care subsidies are provided directly to 2,700 families.

Our government is encouraged that the federal government has announced support for national child care initiatives. Saskatchewan has started to work with Ottawa to address this need.

In the meantime, this Assembly will receive proposals to increase child care subsidies and the number of licensed child care spaces this year.

As our children reach school age, our government responds by supporting programs for Kindergarten to Grade 12. Additional support is provided for at-risk and special needs students.

Funding has been steadily increased for community schools, for developing the School PLUS model, for implementing the *Kids First* program, and for introducing pre-Kindergarten programs.

During 2003, a further 120 at-risk children will receive early childhood development support through *Kids First*. Pre-kindergarten will be expanded to 100 programs in 42 communities.

I note with pride that our government's annual investment per student, from Kindergarten to Grade 12, has risen by 42 per cent during the past five years.

Students are responding well to our education initiatives. Saskatchewan has the lowest high school dropout rate in all of Canada. A greater percentage of Saskatchewan young people are enrolled full time in university than in any other western province.

Saskatchewan's expanding economy, and the growing number of post-war "baby boomers" approaching retirement, will significantly increase the demand for skilled workers during the next fifteen years. As a result, the provision of post-secondary training and education will become increasingly important.

The number of Saskatchewan people participating in post-secondary education is impressive.

More than 30,000 full-time and part-time students attend university. More than 40,000 students participate in various programs offered by the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology. There are more than 30,000 enrolments in regional college classes.

Apprenticeship programs, private vocational training and work-based training also create post-secondary opportunities in our province.

A new innovation in education is *Campus Saskatchewan*, a recently formed partnership of provincial post-secondary agencies. *Campus Saskatchewan* now offers more than 150 on-line courses for adult learners.

Our government is committed to advancing the full citizenship of people with disabilities. To this end, employment support programs will be extended to an additional 680 persons to assist them in achieving greater independence through participation in our provincial labour force.

Enhancements are also planned to Saskatchewan's student loan program. These will raise income exemptions, thereby increasing funds available to individual students. Other changes will recognize the higher costs faced by medical students compared to other courses.

This year, the provincial government, including Saskatchewan's Crown corporations, will provide funding for scholarships, bursaries and grants to more than 11,000 post-secondary students. A further 5,500 students qualify for provincial training and apprenticeship allowances.

Saskatchewan's student employment programs also contribute to the skill development of our young people. During 2002 more than 2,400 students were given work experience and income opportunities through provincial departments and Crown corporations.

Quality education in Saskatchewan is supported by research and development. The provincial government's direct investment in research will exceed $50 million this year, in addition to core funding provided to our universities.

Research undertaken in our province will be further enriched early next year with the opening of the Canadian Light Source Synchrotron in Saskatoon.

In conjunction with the province's post-secondary institutions, the government will step up actions for student recruitment and retention. Greater profile will be given to the variety of courses and student services available in our province, the lower living costs experienced by our students, and the growing range of employment possibilities within Saskatchewan.

Our government's plan recognizes that a comprehensive approach to education creates opportunities for Saskatchewan's young people and supports expansion of our economy.

A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE - ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION

Our government's vision of a strong economy and a secure future requires a healthy environment.

The province's biennial "State of the Environment" report will be tabled during this sitting of the Legislature. It will focus on the health of Saskatchewan's natural environment and the sustainable use of our resources.

Saskatchewan Environment is working closely with others to address environmental hazards. More than 70 orphaned service station sites have been cleaned up. More than 80 landfills have been closed, replaced by regional waste management facilities. SaskPower has undertaken $70 million in modifications to curtail more than 99 per cent of fly-ash emissions at its coal-burning power station at Boundary Dam.

Implementation of Saskatchewan's long-term safe drinking water strategy includes watershed management that protects the source of our water supplies, on-going inspections of water systems in the province, and related education programs.

This year our government will release its first annual State of Drinking Water Quality report. As well, the public will soon be able to access water quality reports for individual communities by way of the Internet.

Last year's drought affected more than agriculture in Saskatchewan. Our province overcame one of the most severe forest fire seasons on record, thanks to the long hours and hard work of our fire fighting crews. Human activity contributed to more than half of all fires.

Our government will propose an enhanced fire prevention information and education campaign to help protect our forestry resource.

Forests are an important commercial resource. They also contribute to the health of our environment, our enjoyment of nature, and the beauty of our urban, regional and provincial parks. Capital improvements for our parks and the planning of several new cottage subdivisions are within the government's plan for the coming year.

Recycling is an important element of environmental management in the province. Increased funding for SARCAN will be provided.

Climate change is a major concern for the health of our entire planet.

Together with other provinces and territories, Saskatchewan agreed to 12 principles as the basis for a national climate change plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Saskatchewan is prepared to work with the Government of Canada to undertake research and implement measures that will reduce greenhouse gases, while ensuring our economy is not disadvantaged.

Our province is already taking action to address climate change.

- Saskatchewan is participating in two wind turbine projects that are generating electrical power in the Gull Lake region.

- We are contributing to a three-year, $5 million study investigating *clean coal* technologies.

- The International Test Centre for Carbon Dioxide Capture at the University of Regina and the Weyburn Carbon Dioxide Monitoring Project are examples of industry and government co-operation to reduce emissions from the use of fossil fuels.

- SaskPower and Saskatchewan Environment are creating a Forest Carbon Reserve, planting five million trees. This is the first forest carbon-sequestration project in Canada to be nationally certified.

I am delighted to inform Members and the public that our government, through its power utility SaskPower, will soon begin implementation of a new *Green Power* portfolio of initiatives.

SaskPower will partner with the private sector to undertake a major expansion of wind power generation. The plan will mean a nine-fold increase in wind power generation in Saskatchewan and will be implemented over three years.

SaskPower will also welcome small-scale renewable energy proposals that generate Environmentally Preferred Power. Beginning this year, proponents will be invited to develop projects that can be fed into the provincial power grid. The first of these projects is expected to come on line in 2005.

A further SaskPower initiative will extend the Crown corporation's *Energy Solutions* program to encourage retrofits to municipal, First Nation and health care facilities – retrofits financed from energy consumption savings.

Beginning in 2003, the Office of Energy Conservation will help municipalities prepare proposals and applications to take advantage of existing energy conservation programs. The Office will also help increase industry awareness of new building techniques for energy-efficient construction and retrofitting.

Saskatchewan farmers are innovators in environmentally beneficial tillage practices that contribute to the reduction of Canada's greenhouse gas emissions, creating agricultural *sinks*. Many farmers also participate in the province's Conservation Cover Program, which converts marginal agricultural land to permanent cover, helping to sequester carbon in the soil.

Our government is disappointed that the Government of Canada has refused to recognize and credit farmers for these agricultural sinks. The federal government has apparently decided these credits will be applied to national targets rather than to the farmers and province where the sinks have been created.

Saskatchewan will insist that this unilateral federal action be a point of negotiation with the federal government.

Our government is also taking action to ensure that a number of abandoned uranium mine sites in northern Saskatchewan are properly decommissioned.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the federal government regulated all uranium mines. In contrast with today's practices, at that time the federal authority imposed no decommissioning requirements when companies ceased their operations.

Discussions have resumed with Ottawa to stress the importance of proceeding as quickly as possible to reclaim these contaminated sites. The Office of Northern Affairs will ensure that northern communities are kept informed of negotiations and will become full partners in implementing the decommissioning projects.

Our government's plan is ensuring that sustainable economic growth is accompanied by environmental stewardship – protecting our natural environment for future generations.

SECURING MEDICARE INTO THE FUTURE

Saskatchewan people have told our government that sustaining medicare, and improving our access to health services, is a high priority.

Our government's plan for strengthening health services was detailed in the *Action Plan for Saskatchewan Health Care*, made public just over a year ago. The direction and priorities of that plan were supported by the findings of the national review of health care led by Roy Romanow.

Implementation of Saskatchewan's Action Plan is proceeding in many areas:

- The transition to twelve Regional Health Authorities is complete.
- A surgical registry is being implemented to manage waiting lists province-wide.
- The contract has been let to establish a 24-hour telephone advice line.

- Increased funding is available for diabetes education, prevention and care.
- A new Northern Health Strategy is in development.
- Ambulance dispatch coordination is improved.
- Saskatchewan is taking on the giant tobacco companies and leading efforts to help de-normalize smoking among young people.
- Canada's first Health Quality Council is in place.

Last month, Canada's First Ministers agreed to several national health care priorities. These priorities will be reflected within the spending plans of our government.

The arrival of West Nile virus in Saskatchewan last year is of concern. Assistance will be provided to municipalities to increase mosquito control in regions where spread of the virus is predicted to occur.

The province will continue to work with Regional Health Authorities, training institutions and professional organizations to support the training, retention and recruitment of health care professionals. To that end, Saskatchewan Health provided more than 400 health professional training bursaries last year.

Three thousand people will be participating in health professional training in Saskatchewan this year. In addition, more than 1,700 persons will receive home care and special care training.

I am particularly pleased to report that northern residents are taking advantage of a new northern health sciences and nurses training program. Forty additional seats were recently announced as part of the northern program, based in Prince Albert. This increases the number of first-year nurse training positions in Saskatchewan to 300.

During this session of the Legislature, the interests of health professionals will be addressed through several legislative proposals. These will pertain to the status of Podiatrists, Occupational Therapists, Pharmacists and Registered Nurses.

Saskatchewan pioneered both publicly administered hospitalization and medicare in North America. Our government's plan will ensure that quality health care is available to all.

SECURE FAMILIES AND VIBRANT COMMUNITIES – FOUNDATIONS OF OUR FUTURE

Within our vision of a wide open future for Saskatchewan, our government believes that secure families and vibrant communities are fundamental to the well being of our people and our province.

Our government's plan to protect and enhance Saskatchewan's quality of life includes support for families and communities.

Saskatchewan's *Building Independence* program continues to reduce the number of families reliant on social assistance. The Saskatchewan Employment Supplement, Child Benefit, Family Health Benefit and a strong economy have assisted thousands of people to enter the labour force – building their sense of independence and self-worth.

More than 6,000 families have left the social assistance caseload since these programs were introduced.

All Saskatchewan families have benefited from reductions in provincial income tax rates and increases in tax credits.

Affordable housing also contributes to secure families and vibrant communities.

The province's Centenary Affordable Housing Program was launched last year with construction of 124 units for seniors and northern families. Plans are now in place for almost 1,400 additional housing units to be built during the next four years.

Saskatchewan citizens living in condominium homes have identified a significant property tax issue. Legislation to provide for the assessment of individual units will be presented to the Assembly.

Safety and security are of importance to all.

This month, extension of Saskatchewan's 9-1-1 emergency service will reach 95 per cent of the phone lines in the province. During 2003, further extensions will occur in the North and the Lloydminster area.

Internationally, security concerns have been heightened since the events of September 11, 2001. Legislation will be introduced in this Assembly to ensure Saskatchewan authorities are able to respond quickly should any threat to public safety confront our communities.

The federal government's *Youth Criminal Justice Act* will come into effect this April, replacing *The Young Offenders Act*. New legislation will be necessary to facilitate administration of the Act.

The federal legislation places greater emphasis on rehabilitation and community re-integration. But it also targets interventions for the most serious offenders.

Our government, working with Regina's City Police, has had significant success with this approach as part of the Regina auto theft strategy. Targeted crime-reduction strategies are now being developed with the cities of Saskatoon and North Battleford.

These initiatives, together with plans to increase resources for our police services, will help ensure greater family and community security.

A number of studies have documented that professional firefighters can experience higher rates of particular diseases as an occupational hazard. The government agrees with the Saskatchewan Professional Fire Fighters Association that an amendment to *The Workers' Compensation Act* is warranted to ensure such diseases are covered under the Act.

Occupational hazards are a primary reason why Saskatchewan and Canada continue to experience unacceptable levels of workplace injuries and illness. During 2003, Saskatchewan will expand its education program to prevent workplace accidents.

Occupational Health and Safety officers will undertake detailed reviews of at least 300 high-risk work places and conduct 3,000 on-site inspections to ensure awareness and enforcement of occupational health and safety regulations.

This year, our government will publish an *Action Plan for Saskatchewan Women*. The plan will guide government departments in facilitating improvements in the social, economic and cultural status of Saskatchewan women and their families.

Governments must be responsive when intervention is necessary to support children and families. Changes to *The Child and Family Services Act* will be proposed to recognize the importance of kinship care as a first option in these circumstances.

During the past several years, the social services system in Saskatchewan has changed its emphasis from that of a traditional welfare agency to one that promotes independence through a variety of supports for families and individuals. To recognize that change, the department of Social Services will be renamed the department of Community Resources and Employment.

Members will be asked to consider additional revisions to legislation governing municipalities. These legislative changes will further strengthen municipal authority for municipal affairs, while addressing a number of administrative requirements.

Members will also be asked to continue provincial initiatives that provide support for municipalities:

- Revenue-sharing grants, which help communities avoid or limit property tax increases.
- Grants in lieu of taxes for provincial government properties located in municipalities.
- Cost-shared programs that assist in meeting infrastructure needs.
- Capital grants to provide transportation services to persons with disabilities.
- Grants and contracts that enable community-based organizations to deliver front line programs – from women's shelters to small business loan associations, from child care services to mental health groups.

The new fiscal year will mark the completion of the government's four-year Centenary Fund program. The Fund will have provided more than $100 million for new school and university construction, highway and road projects, park and heritage property improvements, municipal infrastructure, social housing and environmental clean-up projects.

Support for families and communities is also the purpose of the Saskatchewan Lotteries Agreement, which directs lottery proceeds to more than 12,000 sports, recreation, cultural and community groups across the province.

The Community Initiatives Fund distributes a portion of casino proceeds to groups providing services to families and children. Our government will significantly increase allocations from the Fund this year to support communities preparing to mark the province's centennial in 2005.

The Fund will support community-based projects and events that:

- Celebrate the centennial;
- Improve community cultural and recreational facilities;
- Increase physical activity as a means to better health; and
- Assist Métis and First Nations youth and families to access cultural, sport and recreation activities throughout the province.

Details about these new grant programs and current planning for our centennial year will be announced in the near future.

The government recognizes that volunteer work is key to our quality of life in communities large and small. Saskatchewan people continue to lead the nation in volunteer activity.

Last year, the *Premier's Voluntary Sector Initiative* developed a framework for partnership between the Government of Saskatchewan and the voluntary sector.

During this session, the government will act on recommendations in the framework, including the introduction of legislation to address liability issues for directors of voluntary boards and committees.

Secure families and vibrant communities ... the essence of our quality of life in Saskatchewan.

Events in our world today remind us of the precious peace and security we enjoy in Saskatchewan and Canada. Today we are mindful of our own citizens who are called to serve with our country's armed forces. Today we join with the hopes and prayers of those who seek peace, justice and security for all nations and peoples of our world.

MR. SPEAKER, MEMBERS, CITIZENS:

Our government has a vision and a plan that meets our shared aspirations. The plan is balanced. It is sustainable. It is a plan that works – generating results for our economy, enhancing education and training, protecting our environment, improving health care, and supporting our families and communities.

Our government is implementing its plan by working with, and responding to, the people of Saskatchewan – industries and the business community, professional associations and organized labour, municipalities, First Nations, northern and Métis communities, and volunteer organizations.

It is a vision and a plan that ensures a future of opportunity – a future wide open.

I want to thank our guests for joining us today for the start of the new session.

I want to thank Mr. Speaker and the Members of this Assembly for assuming duties and responsibilities on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan. I trust that Divine Providence will guide your deliberations and decisions in the best interests of all our citizens.

God bless Saskatchewan. God bless Canada. God Save the Queen.